

Tantur Ecumenical Institute Newsletter

**Jerusalem Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (19th -27th January 2013)
*A Tale of Christian Togetherness.....***

**By
Jacqueline Mazoyer**

Latest News and Reviews:

- **Jerusalem Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (19th – 27th January 2013) ; *A Tale of Christian Togetherness* by Jacqueline Mazoyer, Head Librarian (Tantur), originally from Rennes, France**
- **Breaking the Silence** by Br. Bernard White CFC, from Perth, Western Australia, Australia.
- **Through the Lens: A Tantur Digital Experience** by Br. John Walker MSC, Canberra Australian Capital Territory, Australia.
- **A Reflection for January** by Jeremy Howes, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia



The Ethiopian Orthodox Church service providing an amazing atmosphere in what was an amazing week of Christian Unity



With no fewer than nine days of Prayer for Christian Unity celebrated in nine different churches, in the city of Jerusalem where Christ prayed intensely for the unity of his disciples, this event attracts pilgrims and visitors from all over the world. From late afternoon, many of the beautifully ornate Oriental Churches come alive with the magnificence of liturgical chants. Most historic churches are many centuries old and provide a significant backdrop to one of the most important ecumenical events in the Christian calendar. Each Church has an opportunity to display their own rich traditions, and visitors get a once in a lifetime opportunity to experience the services and the varied religious cultures of Jerusalem.

The celebrations commenced on the 19th of January with Orthodox Vespers at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre - or Anastasis, Church of the Resurrection. There we learnt to practice a rather new "spiritual exercise", since languages proved to be a major obstacle on that first day (the prayer being in Greek): we could still however feel united in a prayerful community. It was a moving experience to begin this week at the Calvary, and hear the warm welcome given by Archbishop Aristarchos, Secretary General of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. Following on from that mesmerising opening we attended the Anglican St George's Cathedral whose Bishop and Dean are both Palestinian clergymen. As for all congregations, a daily "glass of friendship" was offered which helped to connect people from all different nationalities and cultures. On Monday we visited the impressive Armenian Cathedral of Jerusalem whose community had just celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ on the 18th of January and there we had the pleasure to witness a cheerful and dynamic atmosphere, with an amazing choir of young seminarians. At the Lutheran Redeemer's Church on Tuesday, a wealth of languages greeted us - German, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Arabic and even Sign language - gave a special touch to this evening assembly. Then the Roman Catholic service was held at the Church of the Franciscans, who have been the guardians of the Holy Places for the Church of Rome since the 13th century.

The small and beautiful St Mark's Syrian Orthodox Church, one of the oldest Christian communities in Jerusalem, welcomed us warmly. According to its tradition, this place was the house of Mary, the mother of Mark the Evangelist. The prayer was in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus. It was accompanied by music and hymns sung by the Coptic monks. Archbishop Swarios gave an eloquent speech on the current difficulties faced by Christian Churches in the Middle East. On the following day, we prayed with the Benedictines of the Dormition Abbey and their German-speaking students: a memorable moment located in the Upper Room, so close to the heart of all the Christians.

On Saturday night we rounded off an amazing week with a visit to the colorful and vibrant Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Splendid and spontaneous songs rang out throughout the church and we were all deeply impressed by the local atmosphere. The last day was spent amongst the magnificent icons of the Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church of the Annunciation at Jaffa Gate. Archbishop Joseph Jules Zerey burst into a communicative joy shared by all! We left the Week of Unity with a positive feeling of wellbeing and felt closer to all our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We will not be foreign to each other when we will meet in these churches again.

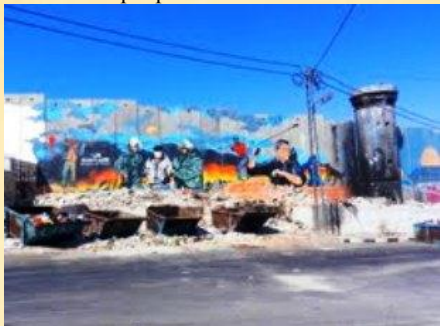
"God of compassion, send us your Spirit to breathe life and healing into our brokenness, that we may together witness to the justice and love of God. Walk with us towards the day when we can share in the one bread and the one cup at the common table".

Breaking the Silence

by

Br. Bernard White CFC

The "Separation Wall" snakes around Palestine cutting thousands of people off from the outside World.



Kids in Uniform patrol who comes in and out to parts of Hebron in Palestine



So many desolate landscapes emerge from the creation of the Serpentine Wall. Maybe both sides should consider turning these areas into to parks and playgrounds to foster peace



Three months at Tantur gave each of us a firsthand experience of the reality of the Israeli military occupation of Palestine i.e. West Bank & East Jerusalem, as well as Gaza in the south. Tantur is situated just a few hundred meters from the eight meter "Security Wall", constructed after the second Intifada by the Israeli government to protect its citizens from the Palestinians, all of who are portrayed as potential terrorists and suicide bombers. We all had the repeated experience of passing through this and numerous other military checkpoints. For us it was something that we did occasionally because we wanted to, and did so with relative ease. For the Palestinians, this is something they do almost daily because they have to, and are not always given such an easy passage by the young Israeli soldiers on duty, all who look extremely bored. Such a negative experience for them at such a young age. Ironically, the greater majority of Israeli citizens do not have this experience. Most have very little idea about the reality of occupation just minutes from their homes and rarely portrayed in the media, or they simply turn a blind eye, assuming that all is well and that they are safe. It often left us wondering how one human being could treat another in this way. It seems such a hopeless situation.

Most Israelis, having completed their secondary education, complete a three-year tour of duty in the Israeli Defense Force. They get to see firsthand what military occupation really means, and, under orders, humiliate, oppress and control the everyday life of Palestinians. They actively engage in abuse, looting, destruction of property and deterioration of moral standards, all justified in the name of Israel's security. Discharged soldiers returning to civilian life discover the gap between the reality they encountered in the Territories, and the silence about this reality they encounter at home. In order to become civilians again, soldiers are forced to ignore what they have seen and done.

Among these veteran combatants there is hope. A growing number of them have made a decision of conscience, exposing to the Israeli public the reality of occupation. They have chosen to "**Break the Silence**", and have formed an NGO by the same name. They have come to realize that there is a gap between the reality they encountered in the Territories, and the silence about this reality they encounter at home. They endeavor to stimulate public debate about the price paid for the reality of the occupation of the Palestinian Territories. In our closing days at Tantur we travelled to South Hebron with three members of "Breaking the Silence", to be shown examples of what occupation means and to hear accounts from veteran combatants of what happened on their tour of duty and how it has affected them. Space does not allow for the retelling of the many stories we listened to. One however stands out, that being an illegal outpost (as distinct from a "legal" settlement), where the residents are so extreme that both the Israeli police and the Israeli Defence Force are scarred to enter into it. On a daily basis, Palestinian children, under military escort, pass by this outpost on the way to and from school. On some occasions they have to take significant detours around it to avoid being hit by the stones thrown at them.

Much more can be found about this organization at their website – www.breakingthesilence.org.il. Available on this site are hundreds of meticulously researched testimonies of veteran soldiers who have spoken out, many of them anonymously due to pressures from the military, family and society.

Through the Lens: A Tantur Digital Experience

by
Br. John Walker MSC

As Tantur pilgrims we are exposed to a variety of life changing experiences that take in the length and breadth of this complex land with its equally complex history: ancient archaeological sites contrasting with magnificent examples of contemporary architecture; harsh desert landscapes and forest clad hills; holy sites validating the presence of three major religious traditions; Arab souks and western style shopping malls; the cavalcade of faces worn with frustration and despair from decades of strife and unrest, and those whose youthful expressions radiate like beacons of hope. Whatever, the moment is always a visual if not at times a visceral experience; one that invariably evokes an emotional response.

As an avid photographer I often found the essence of this land 'I came to walk', peering through the lens of my digital SLR. On any one-day field trip I would capture at least 300 digitalised HDR images in the hope that at least one would be the filter enabling me to 'feel' this Holy Land 'walking through me'; one that captured the creative blend of light, texture and symphony of colours creating its own unique language.

For example, on a Sunday afternoon as clouds were gathering, I trekked down into the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives, and I gazed in awe at the panoramic view of beguiling old Jerusalem herself; the walled city of spires and domes where history piles upon itself and defies you to makes sense of her. (See Photo 1)

And then, as clouds parted overhead casting a pool of light on ancient Jewish tombs below, I observed a ritual; Hasidic Jews dressed in black frock coats and black hats, praying as they moved from tomb to tomb. (See Photo 2)

The act of ritual reminded me of the day we ventured into the Negev Desert under a blazing sun with Jared, our intrepid guide. It was not so much the vastness of the barren landscape that left its indelible mark, it was more Jared's invitation to walk to the rim and stand in silence, apart from each other, gazing out into the desert as he read a passage from Rabbi Kushner on the experience of the wilderness; it was a momentary experience of eternal silence as we acknowledged our own fears, and our dependence upon God in the wilderness of life's journey. (See Photo 3)

One of my favourite images was captured late one afternoon in Bethlehem. Manger Square was thronged with pilgrims from every corner of the globe clambering to enter the Church of the Nativity, whilst I rested against an adjacent wall and observed. However, it was silent moving shadows on the ancient textured façade of the Church that caught my attention; shadows cast by the sun sinking behind bell towers and Christian symbols perched above the wall where I rested. The silence of the image appeared in stark contrast to the commotion below, and I wondered how many people had even noticed this ethereal vision. (See Photo 4)

I have been challenged by this article to be minimalist in my text, and equally selective with images for illustration. Therefore, I will conclude with a photo taken from our hotel in Tiberius overlooking the Sea of Galilee. As I stood alone at sunrise, and looked out across the sea on a sparkling, late autumn morning, my eye fell on the opposite shore, one that seemed untouched since the time of Christ. And I thought to myself, "Christ was here." And just as quickly, the thought came, "Christ is here."

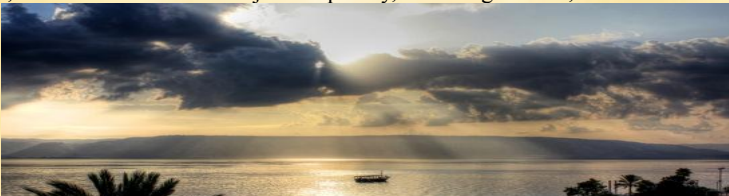


Photo 1 – Beguiling Old Jerusalem



Photo 2 – Hasidic Praying Ritual



Photo 3 – The Stark Beauty of the Negev Desert



Photo 4 – Beautiful Shadows Cast over the Church of the Nativity

A Reflection for February 2013 by Jeremy Howes.

From Holy Thursday night in the Garden of Gethsemane to visiting Yad Vashem, there were countless incredible prayerful and moving experiences during our Easter 2012 visit to Tantur. However an invitation from our Jewish guide led to one of those totally unplanned blessed moments. We went to his synagogue for the prayers at the end of the Passover week and eve of the Sabbath. As the sun began to set, families and individuals gathered at a small hall near Tantur. Inside it quickly filled up as men sat on chairs to the right and behind a temporary screen to the left, the women sat. We men were given yarmulkes to wear on our heads but only the Rabbi at the front wore a prayer shawl. People continued to arrive throughout the prayers – always greeting each other with warm embraces. For the next hour we sang, prayed, interceded, danced and listened to the Rabbi share a teaching. All of it was in Hebrew but strangely seemed familiar. The prayers were fervent, the singing strong and at times incredibly joyful. The highlight was the dancing around the cramped room arm in arm with the other men. We experienced many special liturgies in the Holy Land last Easter but totally unexpected was that this Shabbat Eve prayers would be the most moving for me!

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